



# VETERANS EMPLOYMENT JOURNAL

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## CONGRESSMAN BOB FILNER: WE MUST PROVIDE AN HONORABLE BURIAL FOR SAN DIEGO VETERANS!

WASHINGTON, DC - Congressman Bob Filner has introduced legislation in Congress that would address the extreme shortage of cemetery space for San Diego's 282,000 veterans. The closest veterans cemetery with space remaining is in Riverside - a two hour drive from San Diego.

"We must not forget our veterans," said Filner. "When we called on them to serve, they did not hesitate. Now they need a place where they can be buried with honor."

"I have just introduced, the Honorable Burial for Veterans Act, supported by my colleagues Congressmembers Cunningham, Davis, and Issa. Many of San Diego's 282,000 veterans are concerned that, upon their demise, interment may become a source of frustration for family and close friends."

"Until we get a new national cemetery in San Diego, this bill will provide our region with a viable interim solution to the problem of cemetery space."

A unique collaboration between the private sector, local officials, and veterans organizations has produced an

excellent pilot program - two parcels of land, twenty acres each, have been identified in Glen Abbey Memorial Park in Bonita and in Eternal Hills Memorial Park in Oceanside. Those parcels could complement Fort Rosecrans as satellite cemeteries.

"Providing a final resting place for our brave veterans must be one of our top priorities!"

Statement of Congressman Filner before the House Appropriations Committee:

On Satellite Cemeteries: As a senior member of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, I would like to call your attention to the dire need for cemetery facilities and services for our 282,000 veterans in San Diego County.

Every veteran is concerned that upon his demise, interment may become a source of aggravation for his family and close friends. Ft. Rosecrans National Cemetery in San Diego is no longer open to ground burials, and interment at Riverside National Cemetery is at least a four-hour traffic ordeal for loved ones. The establishment of another National Cemetery in the

San Diego area may not come for decades. It is clear to us that the time is now for additional national cemetery facilities for our veterans, in San Diego County.

A commendable local effort among the private sector, local authorities and veterans organizations has produced what I consider to be a viable interim solution, a pilot program establishing two satellite cemeteries to Ft. Rosecrans National Cemetery.

SCI California Funeral Services, Inc. (a private organization) has agreed to donate to the Veteran's Memorial Center, Inc. (a 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization) two sites within its own Glen Abbey and Eternal Hills cemeteries. The land at each site is over twenty acres and requires contouring to be acceptable for national cemetery interment. Accordingly, I ask: that the Appropriations Committee direct the Department of Veterans Affairs to establish a satellite cemeteries pilot program and provide such funds as may be required for study and acquisition of sites.

On Vietnam Veterans of San Diego: I request your support for

\$2.5 million in funding for the expansion of the Vietnam Veterans of San Diego (WSD) facility from the Housing and Urban Development-Economic Development Initiative account.

The WSD program is privately run and targets homeless veterans with substance abuse and mental illness issues, including post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). With roughly 2,000 homeless veterans in the San Diego region, many homeless vets seeking treatment and housing are kept from receiving it every day because the WSD facility is overcrowded. This expansion would ultimately expand the detoxification, treatment and housing capacity of WSD to more than double its current capacity.

On Filipino World War II Veterans: Since coming to Congress, I have worked to right this wrong. I would like the committee to consider adding \$30 million for access to VA medical facilities, for Filipino World War II veterans who were drafted into service by President Franklin D. Roosevelt and then, shortly after the war ended, were excluded from benefits by the Rescissions Act of 1946.

Particularly unfortunate was the language of this Rescissions Act which said that service in the

Philippine forces was not to be considered active military service for the purposes of veterans benefits. It shocked the thousands of Filipinos who, along with the Americans with whom they fought side-by-side, suffered brutality during the Bataan Death March and as prisoners of war. This change is long overdue.

Congressman Filner announced that a \$15 Million contract has been awarded by the U.S. Department of the Navy to SOLPAC Inc. to build housing at the Naval Air Facility in El Centro.

"America's fighting forces deserve top-notch housing," said Filner. "This contract will provide housing for our military personnel at the Naval Air Facility in Imperial Valley. When our troops come back from a hard day of training, I want them to have clean, modern, and comfortable quarters. I look forward to next summer when the facility will become operational."

This contract will employ approximately 75 people and work on the housing quarters is due to be completed in June of 2003.

Congressman Filner called on the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to provide more accurate and understandable information to veterans.

As an example, Filner cited the fact that letters from the VA usually give veteran claimants different deadlines for submitting information.

"Our veterans risked their lives for this country," said Filner. "Now we are burying them in piles of perplexing paperwork. We should be fighting for them - fighting to give them simple straightforward access to the benefits and services that they earned!"

Filner joined with Lane Evans, the Ranking Democratic Member of the House Committee on Veterans Affairs, to call for better VA communication.

The VA has implemented a "reader-focused writing" approach for their letters. When used properly, it can improve clarity. However, the General Accounting Office recently found that in spite of this new approach, the VA's letters tend to use bureaucratic jargon and are fraught with general phrases that do not correspond to a particular veteran's situation.

"America's veterans, should be able to rely on the VA to make a timely decision and to provide a clear explanation of the reasons for that decision," said Filner. "This must be a priority!"